



Ridgefield Board of Education

**Testimony for the Appropriations Committee
From the Ridgefield Board of Education, Re: HB 7027
Frances B Walton, Chair of the Board
February 21st 2017**

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Frances B. Walton, Chair of the Ridgefield Board of Education, and I respectfully submit this testimony on behalf of the Ridgefield Board of Education. The Ridgefield Board of Education is a dedicated governing body of nine elected citizens committed to allocating the resources necessary to meet the needs of our nearly 5,000 students. The Ridgefield Board of Education is united in opposition to the Governor's **HB 7027**, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, And Making Appropriations Therefor, which seeks to redistribute the costs of the CT Teacher Pension Plan to towns in the state, and reduces the Excess Cost Reimbursement Grant to towns.

We are grateful to the legislature for its ongoing support of education in the State. We understand the state is facing some very tough fiscal challenges this year and that agencies and programs are facing cuts. But we beseech you, please do not make these changes to educational funding. The Governor's proposals will adversely impact the delivery of education to the children of Ridgefield. In addition they will damage the provision of education in the state of Connecticut and will hurt towns as they strive to balance the needs of schools with other community services.

In Ridgefield, we are opposed to the redistribution of costs from the CT Teacher Pension Plan to school districts in the state. This proposal does not address the fundamental problems with the current pension plan; such as underfunding, structural misalignment, and overly optimistic future growth assumptions. The proposal to distribute costs to the towns, without attempting to address any of these foundational problems of the current plan, does not offer a financial resolution to the taxpayers of Connecticut.

Further, Ridgefield residents have already contributed to the Teacher Pension Plan through the state income tax. This proposed change creates a second taxation since the increase will be added to the property taxes levied by the town.



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The Board is also opposed to the proposed changes in Special Education Funding, specifically the Excess Cost Reimbursement (ECR) formula changes. The amount available for ECR has not changed for the last several years, while student needs, especially in the area of anxiety, depression, and school avoidance, have escalated. The flat funding of ECR over the years is in effect a cut in funding. Now the Governor proposes that the towns will be reimbursed on a sliding scale between 0% and 55%. The current funding formula resulted in reimbursements at a rate of 74% -77% for the last few years, therefore future reimbursements under the new formula will result in a significant decrease to towns even if they receive the highest rate of 55%. Every school district will be affected and because of a lack of clarity over the formula, in Ridgefield, we are unable to budget with certainty.

This is in addition to the 2.5% budget cap that was imposed in the current year. This mandatory cap was ill conceived and has driven a wedge between parents of children with Special Needs and the parents of more typically developed children. In attempting to comply with the legislation and carve out Special Education expenses, we have in effect created two separate, and unequal, budgets for our children. This cannot be ignored, and has created division in the parent community. All children are educated in general education classrooms and those with exceptionalities are supported with additional services provided by the Ridgefield Public Schools (RPS). Over many years, successive Boards of Education have endeavored to treat all Ridgefield children with fairness and equity. The spending cap formula has resulted in disharmony as parents question the disproportionate cost per pupil and spending increases in the Special Education portion of the budget, and wonder if this is at the expense of general education advancement, which is capped. In addition, though we are well into our budget process, we have no guidance from the state regarding which specific expenses can be carved out of the cap.

We encourage you to demonstrate your commitment to the taxpayers and students of Connecticut - students who represent the future of our State. Show your commitment to Connecticut students by opposing HB 7027. Don't let this bill become law.

Thank you.